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Syria MDI

COTTON IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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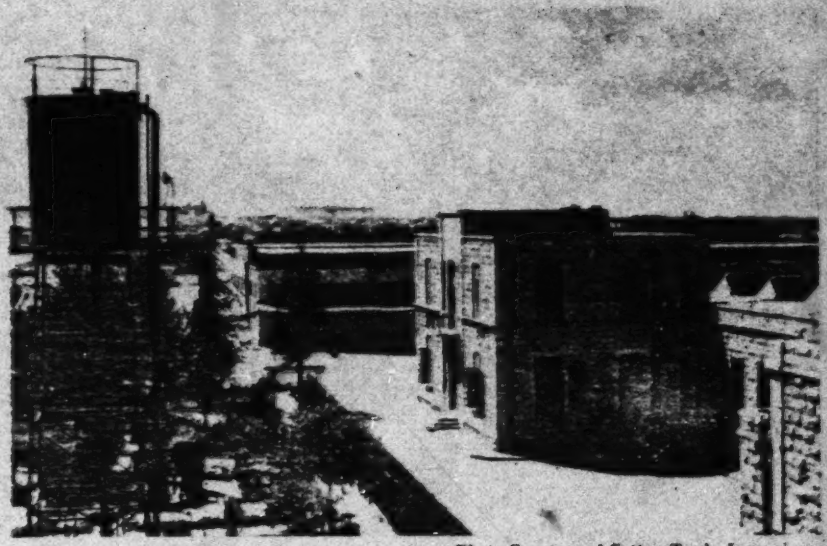

—Photo Courtesy of Cotton Trade Journal

All the cotton in the Aleppo region is ginned at this modern ginning center in Aleppo. Large gins (some have 10 saw gin stands) are located or are under construction on each corner of the square. Buildings are elaborate and usually cost about twice as much as the machinery. The grounds are landscaped like a campus.

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311

inhabited for centuries until a few years ago when farmers from the cities began developing them with mechanical equipment. Large landlords from Aleppo spent millions of dollars installing pumps, building roads, and in other ways developing these lands.

Although occupancy rights have been recognized for years, various government officials with whom the matter was discussed were strong in their views that these newcomers are squatters and should be evicted. They want to distribute the land among the landless peasants. The landlords who have made investments here are just as determined that they will not be evicted. The political strength of the landlords is given generally as the reason for the statement recently made by the head of the government to the effect that the new law will be studied for revision.

While the question of eviction is being debated, the government is proceeding to parcel out other public domains in small units to landless peasants. As this program is expanded, the large landowners are becoming more and more concerned for fear their own properties will be expropriated and subdivided, as has been done in neighboring countries.

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This dispute over the use of public land illustrates the struggle for power going on in Syria today between government bureaucrats and wealthy landlords. The government on one hand is attempting to force changes in all phases of the economy through its various control programs. These changes, however, are strongly resisted by the landowners who prefer to be free from regulations and regimentation. The outcome of this struggle may have a material bearing on the trend in agriculture for the next several years.